

Duck Memorial
Public Library



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2014

The History Of Groce Methodist Church

By Louise M. Farr

Louise M. Farr

Printed by Jarrett's Press, Inc.

Asheville, N. C., June, 1958

PACK MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

ASHEVILLE-BUNCOMBE LIBRARY SYSTEM

Ref.
N.C.
287.6
F239H

The Groce Methodist is named in honor of its first pastor, the Reverend Mr. T. A. Groce, one of the most beloved clergymen in Western North Carolina. Pastor Groce was called from his retirement for the second time to form this new church. Without his help the giant strides made during the early days of the church would not have been possible

The Groce Methodist Church was organized in June, 1953. It is located at 940 Tunnel Road, in Beverly Hills, a residential section of Asheville, North Carolina. Many people had felt the need of a Methodist church in this growing suburb, but nothing was done about it until shortly after the Reverend Mr. J. W. Fitzgerald became the district superintendent of the Asheville Methodist churches. A survey of the area revealed that seven hundred families were living in that community with only a small mission to serve them. Superintendent Fitzgerald was encouraged by Dr. E. H. Blackard and the Reverend Mr. Groce to go ahead with his plans to establish a Methodist church in this vicinity. Dr. Blackard promised liberal support although it would mean the loss of many good members from his charge, the Central Methodist Church. Pastor Groce, who was keenly interested in the project, was appointed to investigate the possibilities of organizing a church in Beverly Hills.

On March 22, 1953, Ministers Fitzgerald, Groce, and Blackard and Mr. Horace McSwain, Secretary of the Board of Missions, met with the Buncombe County Methodist Council and discussed tentative plans for building the church. The council voted in favor of the proposals and voted that Reverend Groce be appointed to organize the new church. The Reverend Mr. Groce at this time was seventy-five years old, but his spirit and enthusiasm were young and contagious. His first action in forming the new church was to gain the interest of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Stevens, members of Central Methodist Church, who lived in Beverly Hills. Mr. and Mrs. Stevens invited the then known Methodist residents in their community to attend the first group meeting of the future church, at their home on Ambler Road, April 15, 1953. Sixteen people, including ministers Groce and Fitzgerald, gathered to discuss the resources available and courageously decided to build a church. The lay people present were: Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Stevens, Mr. and Mrs. Hobart Lee, Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Kanipe, Mr. and Mrs. Hoyt Johnson, Mr. John Perian, Mr. Henry Lehman, Mr. Thomas Dabney, Mr. David Ball, Mrs. Paul Jacobs, and Mrs. Preston Evans.

The two ministers told these people that Bishop Harrell would appoint the Reverend Mr. Groce as minister; that the Board of Missions had agreed to pay him an honorarium of five hundred dollars for the remaining part of the conference year; and that the Board would stand behind the venture with all the means within its power. They recommended a sizeable tract of land facing Tunnel Road, lying between Beverly Road and Bull Mountain Road, as an ideal building site. They said that the owner of the land, Mr. J. O. Smith, was asking \$22,500 for the property, and that Mr. Hobart Lee had offered to donate his services as contractor and had pledged \$1,000 toward the purchase price of the lot. The final selection of a building site was left to the judgment of Pastor Groce and a committee.

Reverend Groce and his committee explored every possible site in Beverly Hills. At two more group meetings held April 26, and May 10, in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Stevens, they reported these findings: that the only suitable lot was the three and six-tenth acres owned by Mr. Smith, that Mr. Smith had quoted a final price, \$21,500; and that he had agreed to accept an option to hold the land until October 1, 1953.

40900P ✓

Sunday, May 31, 1953, Mr. Horace McSwain and the Beverly Hills group met with the District Council of the Methodist Church. It was decided at this meeting to purchase the lot for \$21,500 and to make the required payment of \$1,000 to hold the lot for six months, until the balance of the purchase price could be paid. The Reverend Mr. Groce and Mr. Hobart Lee generously gave five hundred dollars each to make up the thousand-dollar binder, and Judge Guy Weaver was asked to draw up the necessary papers to bind the contract.

The fifth meeting of the Beverly Hills group was a public worship service conducted by Pastor Groce at the Haw Creek School, Sunday, June 7, 1953, at which seventy-five persons took part. After the service Reverend Fitzgerald presided over a conference session in which he outlined all that had been accomplished toward the organization of the new church. He said that the Buncombe County Methodist Council had approved the establishment of a church on the lot selected; that the council would apply to the Board of Missions of the Western North Carolina Conference for a loan of \$10,000; that \$1,000 had been raised by Mission Special; that each Methodist church in Buncombe County would make contributions; and that only \$7,000 would have to be raised by the Beverly Hills congregation in order to purchase the lot by October. This conference voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the name committee that the new church be named Groce Methodist Church in honor of Pastor Groce, who for years has been outstanding in the Methodist ministry, and that upon his death the name be changed to Groce Memorial Methodist Church. This conference also voted to begin regular worship services on Sunday, June 14, 1953, in the auditorium of the Haw Creek School.

Following the first Sunday morning service, another conference was called into session by Superintendent Fitzgerald to elect a Board of Stewards. The slate presented by the nominating committee was accepted and those elected to serve as temporary stewards were: Mr. John Perian, chairman, Mr. Hugh Stevens, vice-chairman, Mrs. Hugh Stevens, secretary, Mrs. Hoyt Johnson, treasurer, Mr. Hobart Lee, Mr. Hubert Kanipe, Mr. Hoyt Johnson, Mrs. Paul Jacobs, and Mrs. Hubert Kanipe.

The first Board of Stewards met June 17, 1953, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George Farr. The Reverend T. A. Groce and the Reverend J. W. Fitzgerald participated in this meeting, which organized a Sunday School. The Board voted to begin holding classes the following Sunday, June 21, 1953; and the first Sunday School teachers and officers appointed at this meeting were: Mr. Thomas Dabney, Sunday School superintendent; Mr. Hoyt Johnson, assistant superintendent; Mr. John Perian, superintendent and teacher of the adult division; Mr. Ray Rast, superintendent and teacher of the youth division; and Mrs. Hobart Lee, superintendent and teacher of the children's division. Further appointments were: recording steward, Mrs. Hubert Kanipe, charge lay leader, Mr. Wesley Dennis, and pianist, publicity chairman, and historian, Mrs. George Farr.

The Woman's Society of Christian Service was organized July 14, 1953, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hobart Lee. The nineteen members chose as their officers: Mrs. J. Wesley Dennis, president; Mrs. Ray Rast, vice-president; Mrs. Thomas Dabney, secretary; and Mrs. Frank Benfield, treasurer. Throughout the ensuing years, the Woman's Society held bazaars, Stanley parties, rummage sales, and bake sales; sold Christmas cards, vanilla, and candy; and served barbecue and chicken pie suppers to raise funds for the church.

In August, the Board elected at their third meeting in the home of Mr.

and Mrs. John Perian eight more temporary stewards: Mr. B. G. McGimpsey, Mr. Ray Rast, Mr. Jack Baber, Mr. J. Wesley Dennis, Mr. C. E. Pope, Mrs. Preston Evans, Mrs. George Farr, and Mrs. John McRary, Jr. At subsequent board meetings held on the first Monday night of each month, Mr. Hobart Lee was made chairman of the Building Committee; Mr. Henry Lehmann, chairman of the Church Property Committee; Mr. Hugh Stevens, chairman of the Finance Committee; Mr. Hubert Kanipe, treasurer of the Building Fund; Mr. J. R. Hudson, chairman of the Membership and Evangelism Committee; Mr. J. J. Edwards, chairman of the Education Committee; and Mrs. A. E. King, chairman of Missions.

During the month of August, Cokesbury Song books were bought, and a choir was organized under the direction of Mr. Bill McRary, Jr., with Mrs. Jack Baber as pianist and served faithfully until 1957.

By September, one month ahead of its goal, the church had purchased the lot. Charter membership began in June and continued through annual conference. September 6, 1953, was designated as Charter Membership Sunday. That day the church was formally constituted a pastoral charge by the Reverend Mr. J. R. Fitzgerald, superintendent of the Asheville District. He received ninety-nine members into the church, including six preparatory members who were christened that day by Reverend Groce. The names of the charter members listed in the printed bulletins for that service were:

Mr. and Mrs. Craig Austin
Mr. and Mrs. Jack Baber
Mr. and Mrs. J. Frank Benfield
Mr. Alex Wilson Benfield
Mr. and Mrs. Horace Carter
Mrs. Nelle Collins
Mr. and Mrs. Albert B. Crawford
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas F. Dabney, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Daniel
Janet Vie Daniel, preparatory member
Mrs. Annie H. Davis
Mr. and Mrs. J. Wesley Dennis
Mr. and Mrs. Charles L. Edwards
Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Edwards
Mrs. Emma Green Evans
Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Faircloth
Wiley Jackson Faircloth, Jr., preparatory member
Ellen Carol Faircloth, preparatory member
Linda Susan Faircloth, preparatory member
Mrs. George Farr
Miss Jean Farr
Mr. George Farr, Jr.
Mrs. Edna D. Hickman
Mr. and Mrs. Lee A. Hollar
Mrs. Paul Jacobs
Mr. Paul Jacobs, Jr.

Mr. John Jacobs
Sarah Chandler Jacobs, preparatory member
David Calhoun Jacobs, preparatory member
Mr. and Mrs. Augustus H. Johnson
Miss Virginia Earleen Johnson
Mr. and Mrs. Frank A. Johnson, Sr.
Mr. and Mrs. Frank A. Johnson, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Hoyt P. Johnson
Mr. Alan Johnson
Mr. and Mrs. Hubert L. Kanipe
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lehmann
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon M. Liverett
Miss Lucy Martin
Mr. and Mrs. B. C. McGimsey
Miss Joyce McGimsey
Mr. Walter McGimsey
Mr. and Mrs. John McRary, Jr.
Mr. John McRary, III
Mrs. James A. Niedermayer
Mr. and Mrs. John Perian
Mr. Douglas Perian
Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Pope
Mr. and Mrs. Ray R. Rast
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ridel
Mr. and Mrs. George M. Roberts
Mrs. Jane Sorrells
Mr. and Mrs. Hugh B. Stevens
Alpha Karen Stevens, preparatory member
Mr. and Mrs. William W. Wells, Jr.
Miss Carole Wright
Miss Cherry Lou Wright

The following names are those of members who by virtue of being received into the church on Charter Membership Sunday, became charter members:

Mrs. William M. Miller
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hudson
Mr. and Mrs. David Ball
Mr. and Mrs. A. E. King
Mrs. Charles Clarke
Mr. and Mrs. Barry Morris
Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Jeffords

At the annual meeting of the Western North Carolina Conference, in September, the Reverend Mr. T. A. Groce was appointed minister of the Groce Methodist Church, and the Reverend Mr. Bernard R. Fitzgerald, son of the district superintendent, was appointed associate minister.

In December, the Men's Brotherhood was organized, with twenty-eight members, in the recreation room at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ray Rast.* Mr. Rast was elected the first president. Thereafter, all meetings were held in the S & W Cafeteria, until the fellowship hall in the church was finished.

**The recreation room in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ray Rast was the source of much fun and fellowship in the early days of the church. There the Board of Stewards were entertained at a dinner given by the Reverend Groce, the first Christmas party was held for the children, a series of Sunday night suppers given by Mr. and Mrs. Rast contributed much in fellowship as well as monetary support for the church. There also, the people learned to hold in high esteem the associate pastor, the Reverend Mr. B. R. Fitzgerald.*

The architectural plans of the church designed on the unit basis included as the first unit, an education building with nine classrooms, two rest rooms, a kitchen, and a fellowship hall. The fellowship hall was to be used temporarily as a sanctuary. Sketches of these plans were first presented by Mr. Jack Baber and Mr. Hobart Lee at the January, 1954, meeting of the Official Board. The drawings, which were duly approved, were prepared through the generosity of Mr. Baber and other members of the Lindsey Gudger Architectural firm.

A campaign was launched in February to raise \$35,000, the lowest estimated cost of the building. A picture of the proposed church appeared in the Asheville Citizen, and gifts of materials and money were solicited and received. The building program was financed by: the sale of \$5,000 in bonds to the Reverend Mr. Joe Brendall, \$5,000 in pledges from the church membership, gifts of \$2,000 from Dunham Foundation, \$300 from Mr. and Mrs. Ben L. Ray, \$1,000 from Central Methodist Church, \$700 from Trinity Methodist Church, \$1,065 from District Mission Specials, \$2,000 from Duke Foundation, and a loan of \$20,000 from the First National Bank in Asheville. By March, the \$35,000 was raised.

The ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of the church was set for five o'clock on the afternoon of March 21, 1954. The day was cold, but a large crowd gathered at the appointed time. The Reverend Messrs. J. W. Fitzgerald, T. A. Groce, and Bernard R. Fitzgerald officiated at the ceremony. Mr. John Perian, chairman of the Official Board, gave an inspiring talk on the valiant work that had been accomplished since the first meeting of that small group of sixteen people. A photographer was present and a picture was taken as the Reverend Groce, aided by Mrs. John McRary, Jr., dug the first shovel of dirt, which marked the beginning of the work on the Groce Methodist Church.

Eight young people joined the church on Palm Sunday, after attending a preparatory class taught by the Reverend Groce, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Baber. The new members were: Jack Baber, Jr., Thomas Baber, Horace Carter, Jr., Jane Dennis, Nina Daniel, Judy Moore, Floyd Stevens and John Stevens.

The Woman's Society of Christian Service had grown so large that in May, it was divided into three circles, with fifteen or more women in each circle. Mrs. Ray Rast served as president.

The Groce Methodist Church observed the first anniversary of its organization, June 12, 1954. The occasion was celebrated by a picnic supper at Haw

Creek School. The membership, by this time, had increased to one hundred and fifteen members.

At the end of the first year, the church lost two of its most ardent supporters, Mr. and Mrs. John Perian, who moved to Durham. Mr. Hugh Stevens then became chairman of the board, and Mr. Frank Benfield was elected to teach the adult class.

In July, the board and congregation accepted the recommendations of the building committee to change the architectural plans to include, not only the education building, but also the walls and roof of the main sanctuary, and to raise an additional \$8,000 needed to cover the high cost of building materials.

On August 12, 1954, the Woman's Society of Christian Service bravely served a barbecue supper and held a parcel post sale in the unfinished fellowship hall of the education building. It rained. The \$800 proceeds of that damp occasion became the nucleus of \$2,500 used in furnishing the kitchen.

August 26, 1954, at the Fourth Quarterly Conference, a rotating Board of Stewards was adopted, and five more stewards were nominated to serve on the board.

Early in September 1954, the Reverend Groce entered Aston Park Hospital, where he survived three serious operations and had his seventy-sixth birthday. The associate pastor, Reverend Bernard Fitzgerald, officiated as minister during the absence of Pastor Groce, and at the Annual Conference of Western North Carolina, held in Asheville that September, the Reverend Fitzgerald was appointed pastor of Groce Methodist Church.

Sunday morning, October 4, 1954, the Reverend Groce was elected Pastor Emeritus and a resolution expressing appreciation of his services was sent to him in behalf of the board and the congregation.

In October, the Methodist Youth Fellowship was organized at the home of Mr. and Mrs. David Ball, with twelve charter members. Miss Jean Chandler served as the first president. Mr. and Mrs. Ball and Dr. John E. Rayle gave many hours of service providing recreation and spiritual counseling for the growing group of young people.

In the fall of 1954 Miss Rachel Franklin became choir director, when Mr. Bill McRary resigned to further his musical education.

In the latter part of November, the congregation moved into the fellowship hall of the new church. The first official service was held December 5, 1954. Mr. John Perian and the Reverend Groce were present and participated in that service.

The sanctuary then possessed only walls and a roof. The window and door openings were boarded up until the \$20,000 note on the education building was paid.

The kitchen equipment was used for the first time during the Christmas holidays of 1954, when a covered-dish supper and a Christmas party were enjoyed in the fellowship hall.

Fifty-eight members were added to the church roll in 1955, and an average of one hundred people attended church every Sunday. In the month of June, 1955, the second anniversary was observed; the Vacation Bible School

was started; the first revival was held; and Mrs. Frances Alderman became the first paid choir director, after Miss Rachel Franklin resigned to be married.

In the fall, the Woman's Society of Christian Service, which had increased from three to five circles, donated \$1,000 to the building fund. The Methodist Youth Fellowship was divided into two groups, intermediates and seniors. Both groups met every Sunday evening at six o'clock, in the fellowship hall, for supper and worship. Dr. Rayl, and Mr. and Mrs. Ball continued as counselors for the senior youth; and Mrs. Ray Rast became counselor for the new intermediates.

The Men's Brotherhood organized work parties to do carpentering, painting, laying of tile, and to cut undergrowth on the grounds. At the end of 1955, the education building was completed and furnished.

In January 1956, the \$20,000 loan from the First National Bank was retired, and at the Quarterly Conference in March, the membership decided to complete the sanctuary. This work was financed by a \$5,000 loan from Mr. Hobart Lee, pledges, and a loan of \$10,000 from the First National Bank. The windows and pews of the sanctuary were provided by members and friends as memorial gifts. The organ was given by the Reverend Groce in memory of his wife. All of these and other gifts are recorded in the Memorial Book, except the window given by Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Krisher, which was omitted by mistake.

The sanctuary was completed in time for the Easter service, April 1, 1956. The choir and the ministers wore robes for the first time. Mrs. S. M. Greer played for this service and became the first church organist.

The church continued to grow during 1956; its membership passed the three-hundred mark, and the church school doubled its attendance. The Junior Girls' Class, organized that year, gave the first mother-daughter banquet, started a library, and sent the first students to attend a session at Camp Tekoa. Girl Scouts, Brownie Scouts, and Cub Scouts organized in the community were sponsored by the church.

The most exciting event, in 1956, was the marriage of the pastor, the Reverend Fitzgerald, to Miss Carol Crockett. It was the first marriage performed in the new sanctuary, and the wedding was photographed by *Look* magazine. The story, featuring the flower girl, Karen Stevens, was later published in June 28, 1957, issue of *Look*, under the title, *The Littlest Member of The Wedding*. The gift of a silver service from the congregation was presented to the bride and groom at the reception in the fellowship hall.

The Woman's Society of Christian Service, under the capable leadership of Mrs. W. D. Krisher, raised \$2,000 to furnish a rented parsonage for the minister and his bride, at 101 Beverly Road.

In the fall of 1956, Mrs. Frances Alderman, the lovable choir director, resigned to accept a teaching position, in a college in Pennsylvania. Within a few weeks, Mrs. Adrian Standaart, a highly trained musician, was employed as organist and choir director. She organized and directs a youth and children's choir, which sings for special occasions.

The year 1957 brought a change of pastors. The Reverend Mr. Bernard R. Fitzgerald was appointed minister of the Mouzon Church in Charlotte, and July 1, the Reverend Mr. Jerry D. Murray became the third pastor of the Groce Methodist Church.

In August 1957, loyalty dinners were held in the fellowship hall to secure pledges for the 1958, \$31,000 budget. That same month Mrs. Ray Rast was reelected part-time secretary to the pastor. Under the direction of the Reverend Murray, she prepared a geographical roll of the church membership. The first issue of *The Groce Gazette*, which Mrs. Rast edits and mimeographs, appeared in September, 1957.

The spiritual growth of the church was extended by the formation of a prayer group. Also many members shared in a twenty-four hour prayer vigil observed prior to a week of evangelism. The youth department have from the beginning been developing a better spirit and are now responding to the wise guidance of Mrs. Lindsey Dixon and the Reverend Murray.

In September, 1957, the first members of the youth department left for college, and the first "teen" ushers from that department were appointed to serve at church service. On the last Sunday in December, the college students and high-school seniors conducted the worship service in observance of Student Recognition Day. George Farr, Jr., presided at this first student recognition service.

At the beginning of 1958, there were twenty-two teachers and officers, and three-hundred and twenty pupils enrolled in the church school. Mr. William McMurray, a lay speaker, who has supplied for the minister on several occasions, has been teaching the adult class since 1956. His class which is the largest class in the church uses the fellowship hall for a classroom. The other classrooms are too small to accommodate the present enrollment. That situation will be remedied within the next year, for the church is now eligible for a grant of \$3,000 from the Duke Foundation, which when received will retire the \$10,000 indebtedness on the sanctuary. As soon as that debt is paid, the church will be virtually debt free, and the board has arranged to borrow \$65,000 to begin construction of a modern education building and a parsonage. The parsonage will be built on a lot purchased for \$3,200, at 70 Fairway Drive, and the education building will be located behind the church. Plans for future expansion include a youth building, and a library and office-wing to adjoin the education building.

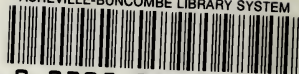
Since the first choir was organized at Haw Creek School, outstanding anthems and special music have been presented under the direction of Mr. McRary, Miss Franklin, Mrs. Alderman and Mrs. Standaart. The choir's rendition of an oratorio, *The Crucifixion*, by John Stainer, directed by Mrs. Standaart during Holy week, of 1958, was a high point in the musical life of the church.

The Reverend Groce with his great appreciation for music, together with his love for all the activities of the church, has endeared himself to the whole congregation. And the congregation has paid tribute to him by giving a testimonial dinner on his seventy-eighth birthday, and by hanging his portrait in the vestibule of the sanctuary, at a special service, on his seventy-ninth birthday.

The Groce Methodist Church celebrates its fifth anniversary, June 15, 1958. At present, there are four hundred members; and the church is a full-grown and self-supporting organization. The record of growth and achievement within the span of five years has been almost miraculous. Little did they dream, that small group of people who met, April 15, 1953, in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Stevens, that so much could be accomplished by faith. Without the courage of those sixteen people, the help of the pastors, and the grace of God, the phenomenal growth of Groce Methodist Church could not have been possible, and this story could not have been written.

APACK

ASHEVILLE-BUNCOMBE LIBRARY SYSTEM



0 0205 0164356 1